John Knox

By

J. D. Mackie

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By

J. D. Mackie, C.B.E., M.A., LL.D.

Professor Emeritus of Scottish History,
University of Glasgow.

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John Knox

DURING his own lifetime John Knox was engaged in violent disputes, and throughout the succeeding ages his character has been the subject of acrimonious controversy. To some of his contemporaries he appeared as the apostle of eternal truth divinely inspired, to others as an architect of evil. Later ages saw him variously as a stirrer-up of strife, the founder of the protestant kirk, the perverter of reform into devious ways, the father of intolerance, the hero of the everlasting verity, the destroyer of the old and the beautiful. For centuries he was, despite all criticism, one of the heroes of Scotland. Latterly there has been an attempt to show him as the man who robbed Scotland of her heritage of art and enjoyment and plunged her into the ugly gloom of a perpetual Sabbath wherein the Calvinistic elect found their main pleasure in denouncing the shortcomings of blinded ritualists. And now the wheel comes round full circle. The latest biographers have seen a human Knox, a victim of his own intensity, hardened into bitterness by cruel experience, but spending himself ungrudgingly and fearlessly for a cause which, as he was sure, was destined to succeed in the end because it was the very cause of God Himself. One thing must be noted, that while there is an infinite variety of opinion as to his character, there is complete unanimity as to his importance. Love him or hate him, revere him or deride him, this was a man. For good or for ill he set his stamp upon the Scottish nation. It is absurd to describe him as the ' maker of the Scottish Reformation,' which was made by no one man and which was begun before he took a share in it ; but to that great movement his indomitable energy and his unquestioning faith gave a purpose and direction which marked it for all time.

The Scottish Reformation was part of a world movement which affected the whole of Christendom at the close of the Middle Ages ; it was part of that rebellion of the facts against the theories which is called the Renaissance. In Scotland, as elsewhere, the ' Reformation ' was produced partly by political and economic causes ; there, as elsewhere, the condition of the Roman church invited criticism, and there, as elsewhere, new ideas had come in. In Scotland the old church had become the ally of economic privilege and the ally of France against England, and there the dissatisfaction with the existing religion had been heightened by an infusion of Lollardy from England, Lutheranism from Germany

by way of the Low Countries, and a more resolute theology from Switzerland. This was introduced, probably in 1543, by George Wishart, who translated into Scots the first *Helvetic Confession* wherein it is clearly stated that the subject's duty to obey the 'magistrate' is limited by the obligation of the magistrate to use his power for the promotion of godliness. Whilst Wishart was active in Scotland some of the 'Anglophile' lords proposed to Henry VIII a plan for the murder or kidnapping of Beaton, and their intermediary was 'a Scottish man called Wysshert.' It is possible that in these hard times the missioner was also the plotter, though this is far from certain. Wishart was arrested in the house of a Lothian 'Anglophile' in December, 1545, and on 1 March, 1546, he was burned as a heretic (not hanged as a traitor) in St. Andrews. On 29 May, Beaton was murdered by a small party of Wishart's admirers who had seized the castle of St. Andrews and who held it until the balance of power was altered by the death of Henry VIII in England and the accession of the martial Henry II in France. The castle surrendered on 30 July, 1547; the garrison was taken to France and some of the prisoners were sent to the galleys. Among these was John Knox.

The Early Life of John Knox

It is as a follower of Wishart that Knox makes his first appearance upon the historic stage. He was present at Haddington in the winter of 1545 bearing 'a twa-handed sweard, which commonly was caryed with the said Maister George'.

Who, then, was this Knox? Our knowledge of him is at once very intimate and very limited. As Raleigh said of Shakespeare, 'he wove upon the roaring loom of time the garment that we see him by'; it is from Knox's own works that we learn most about the writer and for his biographer his works are a tantalizing authority. His minor writings, theological and exhortatory, show us his spirit and occasionally shed light upon his ordinary life. His letters tell us much, but they must be handled with some care; for Knox, though his actual conduct of politics was fumbling, added to the fire of the visionary a surprising political wisdom and his correspondence may not always express his whole mind. It is in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland* that the essential Knox reveals himself most plainly as the leading actor in a great event; but even there Knox the autobiographer is secondary to Knox the historian.

For Knox, history recorded the unending struggle between God and the devil, and in that struggle he had been called to play a part; when he was actively engaged in preaching and in debate he felt that his doings were worthy of mention. When, on the other hand, he was not personally struggling for the truth it seemed to him that the events of his own life were of little importance.

Of his suffering in the galleys, for example, he says very little, recalling only a few incidents where his personal conduct seemed to have some place in the divine plan. Of his early life he says nothing and only incidentally does he inform us as to his origin. When, in 1562, Mary's Bothwell sought his aid towards a reconciliation with Arran he replied to the earl that he had 'a good mynd to your house. . . . For, my Lord, my grandfather, goodsher, and father, have served your Lordshipis predecessoris, and some of thame have died under thair standartis; and this is a part of the obligatioun of our Scotishe kyndnes . . .' His family, he claimed, were dependents of Hepburn of Hailes whose hereditary castle was within a few miles of Haddington. He was a Lothian man and it may be remarked in passing that the contemporary English account of the expedition to Pinkie mentions the capture, not far from Haddington, of a comical Scotsman whose name was 'Knockes'. He may have been a kinsman of the reformer, and the point is of some interest because a seventeenth century biographer of Knox (David Buchanan, 1644) alleged that his hero was closely connected with the gentle house of Knox of Ranfurly, near Paisley.

The little which Knox tells us of himself is confirmed by his first biographer, Theodore Beza, who included a picture and a brief life in the *Icones* of Protestant champions which he published in 1580. According to him Knox was *Giffordiensis*—Giffordgate is a suburb of Haddington—and since he is said to have died at the age of fifty-seven in 1572 he must have been born in 1515. From other evidence it is certain that Beza was supplied with both the picture and some biographical material by Scotsmen who had known Knox personally, and his story seems well founded, though one of his authorities, Sir Peter Young, said that Knox was fifty-nine when he died. In Arabic numerals the figures seven and nine might easily be confused and Knox may have been born in 1513. Beza goes on to say that he studied under John Major at St. Andrews and bade fair to rival his master in sophistry; that he was driven into criticism by the reading of Jerome and Augustine and, as a consequence, was compelled to take refuge with John Cockburn of Ormiston. From Ormiston he issued a statement of his faith which caused Cardinal Beaton to strip him of his priesthood and condemn him for heresy, but he was preserved by the protection of Douglas of Longniddry. This brief account contains obvious misconceptions; Longniddry was not, as Beza supposed, a very powerful noble, and there is no mention elsewhere of the condemnation of Knox by Beaton; but it may be essentially true.

Archbishop Spottiswoode in his *History of the Church and State in Scotland*, said that Knox was sixty-seven when he died; the rash David Buchanan did the subtraction sum and boldly declared in the

Life, which prefaced his edition of Knox's works, that Knox was born in 1505. He did not see the consequence of his assertion, and neither did any other biographer till David Laing, in 1846, issued the first volume of what is still the standard edition of Knox's works. Well aware that boys in the sixteenth century went up to the university at a very early age, and influenced, perhaps, by the alleged connection with Ranfurly, Laing held that Knox must have been educated at the university of Glasgow, where John Major taught between 1518 and 1523. The discovery of the name 'Johannes Knox' amongst the incorporates of 1522 supported this opinion, the more since the only 'John Knox' upon the St. Andrews rolls was incorporated in 1571.

1505 was confidently assumed to be the birth year of Knox until 1905, when the proposal to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of Knox's birth stirred into activity doubts which had long existed in the mind of Hay Fleming. To him it seemed improbable that a man born in the Lothian (an archdeaconry of St. Andrews) should seek his education anywhere else than in St. Andrews; and it was obvious, he thought, that in the career of Knox St. Andrews played a far greater part than did Glasgow. When the examination of an original manuscript of Spottiswoode's *History* gave his age as fifty-seven, not sixty-seven, the cautious critic concluded that, in all probability, Knox was born about 1514 or 1515.

Hay Fleming's view is generally accepted, though he himself was too good a scholar to be unaware that it presented difficulties. As Hume Brown had pointed out, George Buchanan, who was born near Glasgow, went to St. Andrews because Major was there; and for the same reason Knox, who was born near Haddington, might have attended Glasgow. Again, Catholic controversialists made much of the fact that Knox was a very old man when he married his second wife, Margaret Stewart of Ochiltree, in 1564, and all contemporary writers agree that he was in extreme decreptitude when he died in 1572. In reply it can be urged that to the sixteenth century forty-nine might seem a considerable age, especially when the bride was a girl of sixteen or seventeen, and that Knox's health, obviously never very robust, must have been shaken by his experience in the galleys.

On the balance of the evidence the safer conclusion seems to be that Knox was educated at St. Andrews and that he studied with success. It is certain that he was a priest in Haddington in 1540 and that he acted as a notary for some years. He must, therefore, have been an active man of thirty when he joined himself to Wishart's company; and though there is some ground to suppose that his knowledge of Greek was less than he pretended when he mocked the Catholic disputants for their ignorance about *agape*, it is evident that he was well instructed in Latin and in the dialectic

which was so prominent in the scholastic training of that time. That he had conspicuous gifts appears from his career.

He was saved from sharing Wishart's fate by the action of his master, who dismissed him with the words 'one is sufficient for one sacrifice', and he became tutor to the sons of Hugh Douglas of Longniddry. In that service he remained until fear of persecution drove him, about Easter, 1547, into the castle of St. Andrews, where Beaton's assassins were still holding out, partly because they held Arran's son as a hostage partly because the Scottish gunnery was ineffective. A curious truce prevailed during which the 'Castilians' went freely into the city and Knox was able to teach in the parish church as well as in the castle chapel. Before long he was summoned, from the pulpit, by John Rough (who had begun as a friar and was to end as a martyr at Smithfield in 1557), himself to exercise the office of preacher. He burst into tears, but he could not refuse the call and thereafter distinguished himself in debates against the Catholic clergy.

Either because of his eminence in this matter, or because of his undistinguished birth, he was, unlike some of his fellow-captives, doomed to the galleys when the castle fell, in contravention, as he asserts, of the terms of surrender; and in the galleys he remained until he was freed in February, 1549, at the instance of England, then moving towards peace with France. Normally the galleys were laid up in winter and his durance cannot have been uniformly severe, for he was able to revise a Lutheran tract, a treatise on Justification, written by Henry Balnaves, who was confined at Rouen, and he was able to communicate with others of his fellow prisoners, assuring them that in the end they would all be free. Yet his existence was miserable enough; he nearly died at sea when the galleys returned a second time to Scotland, though, as he recorded with pride, he was still able to predict that he would live to preach once more in the church of St. Andrews, whose steeple he could behold from the waves.

Knox in England

On his liberation he found refuge and advancement in the Protestant England of Edward VI. He was appointed to be a licensed preacher, first at Berwick (April, 1549) and later at Newcastle (1551). Whilst in the north he made the acquaintance of Mrs. Elizabeth Bowes, daughter of Roger Aske and wife of Richard Bowes, captain of Norham castle, who was a Bowes of Streatlam and brother to Sir Robert Bowes, Warden of the Marches, and to Sir Ralph Bowes, knighted at Flodden. Mrs. Bowes took Knox to be her spiritual adviser and Knox paid court to her daughter Marjory, whom he afterwards married. In all likelihood the betrothal was promoted by the pious mother, who was an heiress in her own right; but it gave great offence to her gentle kin.

There is no need to doubt Knox's assertion that his preaching did much to reduce turbulent Berwick to order, but the fact that, in April, 1550, he was summoned before Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of Durham, to explain his doctrine, signalizes a matter of great importance. Knox in fact was one of the many foreign Protestants who flocked into England in the days of Edward, and who were persuading the deliberate Cranmer to advance further and more swiftly than he meant to go. To these vigorous reformers the First Prayer Book of 1549, which Gardiner could accept, was still clogged with the superstitions of popery, and great efforts were made to guide the English Church into a better way. The views of the forward party commended themselves to the ambitious Northumberland, who saw no hope in Mary and Spain, and in 1551 Knox was appointed one of the six royal chaplains. Next year he was brought south, perhaps to remove him further from the Scottish border, ostensibly to deal with the Anabaptists, but also to be a whetstone to quicken the archbishop. There was a proposal, supported, as Knox afterwards alleged, by Cecil, to give him the see of Rochester; but if the offer were formally made he refused it, and as he publicly compared the Duke of Northumberland to Achitophel and the marquess of Winchester to Shebna, it is little wonder that he was found 'neither grateful nor pleasable'. He was twice summoned before the privy council, the second time, perhaps, because he refused the living of All Hallows in Bread Street; but though disliked by Northumberland, he still had influence, and it was largely at his insistence that there was added to the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI the famous Black Rubric which explained that to receive the Communion kneeling did not involve adoration.

Knox's attitude to Northumberland may be held to show self-interest in that he declined to trust his fortunes to a regime which could not last. More justly may it be said to reveal political wisdom simple, but profound; professions of extreme piety by men who were bad were not to be trusted, and according to Knox's standards Northumberland was bad. To him the fall of the wicked duke must have seemed a just dispensation of providence and, like other people in England, he may have hoped for a short time that Mary would not prove a persecutor. He remained preaching at Amersham, whither he had withdrawn after his trouble with the council, until the end of July, but he was in London to witness Mary's triumphal entry. On 22 December he was at Newcastle, and it was only in March, 1554, that he crossed the sea.

Knox on the Continent, 1554–1559

Arrived at Dieppe with ten groats for all his wealth he paused only to complete *A Godly Letter of Warning or Admonition to the Faithfull in London, Newcastle and Berwick*, and set off for Switzerland;

there he had discussions with Calvin at Geneva and Bullinger at Zurich, in an attempt to resolve his mind as to the attitude a true Christian should adopt towards an idolatrous prince. He returned to Dieppe in May to find that in England Mary was contemplating the marriage with Philip and that in Scotland Mary of Guise had assumed the regency in the name of her daughter who was not yet twelve years old—'als seimlye a sight', he thought, ' (yf men had eis) as to putt a sadill upoun the back of ane unrewly kow '

From Geneva he soon accepted a call to Frankfurt, where a congregation of English refugees had been allowed by the magistrates to worship in a church assigned to Vallerand Pullain and the French Protestants ; but from this charge he was soon ousted by a fresh influx of Englishmen led by Richard Cox, afterwards Bishop of Ely. The new-comers wished to use the English Prayer Book, and it would have been easy for Knox to prevent their intrusion unless they undertook to abandon it on the ground that they proposed to depart far from the French form ; but he, confident as ever in his own rightness, made no scruple in admitting them. Once admitted, however, the new-comers outvoted Knox, raised a clamour that his *Faithful Admonition* contained animadversions on Mary which the Emperor must resent, and scared the magistrates into dismissing him from the city in March, 1555.

He returned to Geneva, where Calvin, now in full control, was establishing a discipline entirely to his mind, but though he resumed his ministerial labours he soon set off to Scotland, perhaps on the summons of Mrs. Bowes, perhaps because he felt that the situation there was more promising than had seemed likely.

The position of the Protestants had now become markedly easier. To Knox this seemed a result of the inscrutable wisdom of God, who turned the wicked purposes of 'Sathan' to his own ends; the accession of 'mischevous Mary of the Spaniard's blood' had had the effect of driving into Scotland leaders of the new faith like William Harlaw, simple and devout, and John Willock, educated and experienced. The truth is that Mary of Guise, anxious to establish her authority in the interests of France, found herself opposed by the Hamiltons, whose head, the earl of Arran, given the title of duc de Châtelhérault (the revenues of which proved hard to secure) she had displaced from the office of governor. As John Hamilton, the duke's half-brother, was archbishop of St. Andrews, the regent could place no great reliance upon the Scottish church, and, indeed, whilst showing herself charming and complacent to all, she took no decisive action against the Protestants until her daughter was safely married to the Dauphin on 24 April, 1558. After the burning of Adam Wallace in the summer of 1550 there was no execution for heresy in Scotland till the aged Walter Mill was burned at St. Andrews in April, 1558. Knox, therefore, when he

came to Scotland in the autumn of 1555, enjoyed an astonishing impunity. He taught in Edinburgh, discussed the propriety of bowing down in the house of Rimmon with a group of influential men, and moved freely about in Scotland preaching and ministering the Sacrament. Although the scandalized clergy summoned him to appear at the Blackfriars Church in Edinburgh on 15 May, 1556, 'that dyet held not' because his adherents, led by Erskine of Dun, convened in great force. Knox, who had appeared in Edinburgh, remained there for ten days, preaching to greater congregations than ever in the Bishop of Dunkeld's great lodging. Emboldened by the interest shown by some of the nobles, he sent a letter to the Queen Dowager by the hand of Glencairn, evidently in the hope of making a convert; and he was probably cut to the quick when the lady handed it with a jest to the Bishop of Glasgow —'please you my Lord to read a pasquil'. He left Scotland in July only at the urgent request of the English congregation in Geneva which had chosen him as minister, and when, after his departure, he was condemned and burned in effigy he replied by composing an *Appellation to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland*, which was published only in 1558. In Geneva he remained as minister of the congregation until the autumn of 1557, when, rather hesitantly, as it seems, he moved in response to letters from Scotland and came to Dieppe. He arrived on 24 August, only to find letters of a very different tenor awaiting him and either because of them or because the Spanish victory of St. Quentin, on 10 August, had confused the situation, he abandoned his enterprise and returned once more to Geneva. He denied, even to himself, that his retreat was occasioned by fear, and it was, perhaps, dictated by political considerations, which he attributed to the guidance of God; but his very discussion of motives indicates an uneasy conscience, and it was in the resultant bitterness of mind that he began to write *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. The second and third blasts which had been prepared were never sounded; the first did damage enough to the trumpeter. The book was printed only in 1558 and in November of that year Bloody Mary died, to be succeeded by the godly Elizabeth. Knox, in his later dealings with Elizabeth and his own Queen Mary, tried to temper his conclusions by references to Deborah, but neither princess ever forgave him.

As a result rather of his own experience than of the discussions he had with other Protestant leaders, Knox suffered a change in his political opinions during his period upon the continent. Neither Calvin nor Bullinger had encouraged the view that armed resistance to an ungodly prince was the simple duty of good Christians, and when, in 1554, Knox sent his *Comfortable Epistle to the Afflicted Church of Christ* he warned his readers not to be 'revengers' in their own cause, but to leave vengeance to God.

Only a few weeks later, however, in *A Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England* he prayed that God would, 'for His great mercies sake, stirre up some Phinees, Helias or Jehu, that the bloude of abhominable idolaters maye pacifie Goddes wrath . . .' This was a direct incitement to tyrannicide, and while, in his later works, the writer was, as a rule, less explicit, he evidently subscribed to the doctrine that rebellion against an ungodly 'magistrate' was entirely justifiable. Any hope he had had of an accommodation with the Queen Regent vanished when she sneered at his 'pasquil', and it is just possible that the discouraging letters which he received at Dieppe in October, 1557, were due to the belief among the Protestant nobles that he would be an embarrassing ally. In the following December, it is true, some of them, including Argyll, Glencairn Morton, Lorne (Argyll's son), and Erskine of Dun were constrained to unite themselves by the first formal 'Covenant' binding 'the haill congregation of Christ' to wage war against 'the congregatioun of Sathan'; but some politic heads may still have hoped that they could drive the Queen Mother to make terms. Hence the year 1558 was passed in an uneasy truce in which, even after Mary's marriage to the Dauphin was completed, the Protestants showed themselves confident if not aggressive;—in Edinburgh itself the great procession of St. Giles on 1 September was broken up by a disorderly mob. Knox, in his *History*, represents that the action of the crowd was spontaneous, but from that account itself the reader may infer some prearrangement. As the Covenant was obviously an instrument for war, and as the conferences of Marcoing and Cercamp in 1558 presaged the union of the Catholic powers in the peace of Cateau-Cambrésis of April, 1559, it may seem to us to-day that an open breach was inevitable; but this did not occur till, on 10 May, 1559, the Queen Regent outlawed the Protestant preachers for 'non-compearance' at Stirling although she had solemnly promised, under Protestant pressure, to delay their trial. Next day the religious houses of Perth were sacked by the mob, and although Knox alleges, in one place, that the disorders were the action of 'the raschall multitude,' he also says that 'the spoile was permitted to the poore' as if the leaders had had the power to prevent it, and in a private letter he attributes the deed to the brethren.

Knox in the Crisis of 1559–1560

Knox should have known the truth of the matter, for he himself was on the spot. Whether he was definitely summoned or whether he smelled the battle from afar when the trumpets sounded to Armageddon is not known; but he came to Edinburgh on 2 May and hurried off to Dundee and so to Perth. It may be presumed, though it is not certain, that he was one of the preachers whose

denunciation of idolatry stirred up the final outbreak. From Perth the 'Congregation' advanced fairly rapidly to Edinburgh, which they occupied on 29 June; on 26 July they were driven out, but though they returned again, with the assistance of the Hamiltons, and 'deposed' the Queen Mother on 21 October, their triumph was short-lived. Reinforced by French troops, who, to the general alarm, brought their wives with them, Mary fortified Leith, and early in November the Congregation abandoned the capital once more. They halted for a while at Stirling; but d'Oysel, the French ambassador, following up his advantage, swooped upon them there, cut their forces in two, drove the westerners home in dismay and followed the others up along the north shore of the Firth of Forth. Fighting valiantly, the reformers were driven east; the French established a base at Kinghorn opposite Leith; the Lord James with his friends girded himself for the defence of St. Andrews. On 22 January, however, English ships appeared in the Firth and cut the supply lines of the French, who sullenly withdrew over the country they had wasted in their advance. Scottish negotiators went to Holy Island; on 27 February a contract was concluded between James Duke of Châtelhérault as second person in Scotland and Thomas, Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal of England, for the expulsion of the French forces. An English army appeared early in April. Leith defended itself manfully, but the death of the Queen Regent on 11 June weakened the cause of France, and on 6 July was signed the treaty of Leith or Edinburgh, between England and France, to which certain important sections dealing with the affairs of Scotland were appended.

The essential points were that while Mary and Francis were acknowledged to be sovereigns in Scotland Mary was to renounce her claim to the English throne; that French troops were to withdraw altogether from Scotland; that the Scots might summon a parliament and arrange a provisional government of twelve members of whom Mary should appoint seven out of a list of twenty-four prepared by the estates. The effect was to leave power in the hands of the Protestant party, though it was provided that the parliament was not to make decisions on matters of religion, but only prepare proposals to be submitted to the Queen and her husband.

In all the stirring movement of the revolution Knox played a conspicuous part. His was the voice which incited to the 'purgation' of St. Andrews by preaching (on 11 June, 1559) upon the ejection of the traders from the temple of Jerusalem, and which, when all was going ill, proclaimed an undying confidence in the great sermon preached at Stirling on 8 November, 1559. His was the pen which drafted the various memorials in which the Congregation justified its actions on the ground, largely, of

the double-dealing of the Queen Regent on the point of religion. The second book of his *History*, a *livre de circonstance* written in the heat of the action, sets forth his attitude of mind with clarity, or with seeming clarity. Yet it must be noted that in the justification, written in Latin, which the lords presented to the great world of politics, little is said of religion at all; there the *gravamen* is the attempt of Mary to turn Scotland into a province of France. That Knox was aware of the political aspect of the struggle is obvious. He knew that the lords hoped for English help; he himself was in touch with Cecil, with whom he had communicated from Dieppe in April, as early as 19 July, 1559; and for the rest of the year he was actively employed in soliciting English aid. 'In twenty-four hours', he wrote, 'I have not four free to naturall rest, and ease of this wicked carcass'. He strove awkwardly enough to pacify Elizabeth about the unfortunate *First Blast*; he constantly urged the sending of English troops, or at least English money; and when the Elizabethan government, not being at war with France, hesitated to act, he even proposed that a thousand or more men might be allowed to come as volunteers or even as denounced rebels. He was one of the emissaries sent to England early in 1560; but he turned out to be so maladroit a diplomatist that Sir James Crofts, captain of Berwick, sent him home on the ground that eloquent preachers were sorely needed in Scotland, and the negotiation was entrusted to others, among whom the able William Maitland of Lethington became conspicuous. When, at a later date, between 1564 and 1566, probably towards the end of 1565, Knox continued his history in what is now Book III, he was at no pains to conceal his political action, and included in his text some of his diplomatic correspondence.

How are we to account for the fact that in the original book two of 1559-60, Knox represented the revolution as almost purely religious and said so little of the political issue which was emphasized by the protagonists of his party? It may fairly be supposed that he did not wish at the earlier date to disclose the negotiations with England (in fact his work, though known to Randolph in September, 1560, was not published till a much later date). Yet it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he wished to make the best case possible against Mary of Guise and that he felt safest upon the ground of religion. In support of this view it may be urged that either he was not fully apprised of the actions of his leaders or that he glossed them over. His version, for example, of the 'Appointment' made at Leith on 24 July, 1559, when the Congregation abandoned Edinburgh for the first time, is rather curious. He states plainly the *desiderata* of the Congregation, which included the condition that the Mass should not be re-introduced into any place where it was then suppressed; with equal clarity he sets forth the arrangement actually made which does

not include this clause; he then prints a proclamation made by his own party which does include it. The discrepancy between the two versions he explains away on the ground that the 'alteration in words and order was made without the knowledge and consent of those whose counsel we had used in all cases before'. From the context this appears to mean that some persons other than Knox and his friends had signed the agreement on behalf of the Congregation; that Knox unconcernedly regarded their action as invalid, and that he accused the Queen Mother of treachery in that she did not keep an agreement which had not, in fact, been made. His ignorance or disingenuousness with regard to the Protestant mobs has already been noted. Plainly, book two, in its original form, was a party pamphlet, and it was possible for Andrew Lang in *John Knox and the Reformation in Scotland* to argue that it was not the Queen Mother but the Congregation which practised deceit.

For Knox it must be said that if he 'dressed' his facts for his *livre de circonstance* he did not depart seriously from the truth as he knew it. For him the religious issue was the essential issue. It must be added that fundamentally he was quite right. There was a real intention to bring Scotland completely under the control of France; Mary of Guise was merely driving time; her fixed purpose was to promote the interests of her house, which, even more than the royal house of Valois, was devoted to the Roman Catholic cause. Mary may not have been personally cruel and dishonest—even Knox's account, in spite of its vituperation, endows her with charm—but she was single-minded in her cause, and Knox, who thought that her cause was of the devil, strove to suppress it with every means within his power. His effort was successful. Granted that political and economic factors operated on his side; it is certain that it was his own fierce energy which held his party together in the evil day and contributed greatly to the final success. As Randolph said of him 'the voice of one man is able, in an hour, to put more life in us, than six hundred trumpets continually blustering in our ears'.

The Revolution Settlement, 1560

The settlement made by the triumphant revolutionaries reveals both the underlying spirit and the creative hand of Knox. The parliament promised by the treaty of Leith duly met on 1 August. An attempt was made both then and later to deny its competence upon technical grounds, but this Knox brushed contemptuously aside—'that we litill regarded, or yit do regarde'. For him, evidently, the revolution was a law unto itself. Touching the manner of holding parliament he had, in fact, little to defend; but the application of his argument to the work done by parliament

was far less defensible. The treaty of Leith had plainly provided that no decision on ecclesiastical matters was to be taken without reference to Mary and Francis, but the parliament boldly effected a complete revolution in ecclesiastical affairs. It at once began to consider a *Confession of Faith* which was passed clause by clause in the face of a very feeble protest by a few bishops, and on 17 August was ratified in its entirety. A week later the whole foundations of the Roman church in Scotland were swept away by three acts passed on a single day:—the authority of the Pope was abolished; all acts not in conformity with the Confession were abrogated; the Sacraments were reduced to two and the celebration of Communion, except in the Protestant fashion, was made punishable by a gradation of penalties culminating in death for the third offence. As compared with the almost contemporary English settlement there were both differences and resemblances. Whereas the English Act of Uniformity enforced the use of one form of public worship the Scots were content to condemn only one religious rite, the Mass. In fact, the *Book of Common Order*, used by Knox's congregation in Geneva, was generally introduced and, with its accompanying version of the Psalms, remained the accepted standard in Scotland until the *Directory of Public Worship*, made by the Westminster Assembly, was established in 1645. It may be noted in passing that this *Book of Common Order*, though often called the Geneva Book, was founded upon a manner of service used by the congregation at Frankfurt, and that it was itself rather a directory than a set form.

Again, while the English Act of Supremacy endowed the crown with most of the privileges taken from the Pope, the Scottish Act stopped short with the abrogation of papal power. The *Book of Discipline*, prepared by Knox and his friends, provided for an independent church whose authority was rooted in congregations made wise by the Word of God. But this *Book of Discipline*, though at first a good number of nobles and gentry subscribed to it, was never accepted by the parliament of 1560 or by any other parliament, and remained an ideal. Maitland of Lethington said in 'mockage': 'We mon now forget our selffis, and beir the barrow to buyld the housses of God'; the Protestant politicians had not overthrown Rome to endow a pack of enthusiastic ministers and to them the aspirations of Knox were 'devote imaginationis'. The Presbyterian church which eventually emerged in Scotland found its constitution and its machinery only by slow development.

Both the *Confession of Faith* and the *Book of Discipline* were prepared by a committee of six ministers, the 'Six Johns' (Winram, Spottiswoode, Willock, Douglas, Row, and Knox), and throughout both the absolute conviction and the driving force of Knox are evident. The Confession of Faith, though it owes

something to John à Lasco and even something to Luther, is in the main Calvinist. It begins with first principles—with God and the creation of man; it then explains how Adam and Eve transgressed, and how 'the image of God was utterly defaced in man' who could be redeemed from the ensuing bondage to Satan only by 'the power of the Holy Ghost working in the hearts of the elect of God'. While the *Confession* takes the essential kirk to be a mystical body of all ages, nations, and tongues, invisible, known only to God and containing the kirk triumphant as well as the kirk militant, it goes on to set forth the 'notes' by which a true kirk could always be distinguished—the true preaching of the word, the right administration of the Sacrament, and ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered. (The same *criteria*, it may be observed, are set forth in the famous *Admonition* presented to Elizabeth's parliament in 1572.) The obvious difficulty involved in the use of the words 'true' and 'right' is met by the assertion that true doctrine is to be found in the Scriptures interpreted on the assumption that the Holy Spirit could never contradict itself, and that the actual sayings and doings of Christ would provide a constant standard. Plainly the ministers, who were not only the proper interpreters of the Word, but the proper administrators of the Sacraments, were given great power; and the section on the 'Civile Magistrat', while magnifying royal authority, limits it by the *caveat* that this authority must be used to promote good and redress evil.

The effect of the *Confession* was therefore to establish an authority outside of that of the state, and as this authority lay in the hands of the kirk as the interpreter of God's will, it was obviously necessary to explain at full length the fabric of an organization which could truly interpret the Scriptures, rightly administer the Sacraments, and justly uphold ecclesiastical discipline. The attempt was made in the *Book of Discipline*. Proceeding on the assumption that the wealth of the secular clergy of the old church should go to the new kirk, the book provided for the establishment of ministers throughout Scotland and for the erection of a national system of education; it also made some suggestions, undeveloped, for the relief of poverty. The minister, whose work was the essential feature of the whole structure, could be appointed only after a process of election, examination, and admission, and it was by the congregation that he was to be elected. Because this was so, and because the minister was always subject, in some degree, to the censure of his flock, it was absolutely necessary for the congregation to be properly educated. To that end was devised a magnificent system of elementary and secondary schools and well organized universities controlled by examinations and certificates in the modern way. Young people who showed themselves not to be book-minded were to be trained

to a craft, but every child, rich or poor, was to have the fullest opportunity.

Realizing that some time must elapse before a sufficient number of ministers could be found, the authors of the book provided for 'readers' who might do parochical work under supervision, and for 'superintendents' who should, besides superintending his area, ride round and oversee the working of the church in outlying districts. The office of superintendent was apparently copied from a Danish model. These superintendents were to be well paid. As the ten areas assigned to them represented a sensible readjustment of the old dioceses, and as Knox, at the end of his life, was prepared to accept the 'Tulchan' bishops erected by Morton*, it has been argued that he was not opposed to episcopacy. Too much has been made of this. It is a matter of terms. Knox, though not very learned in Greek, must have known that 'ἐπίσκοπο's' meant 'overseer', and in that sense would recognize that 'superintendents' might well be useful in an unformed church. His superintendents, however, were under the censure of their subordinates; like ministers they could be elected and deposed; the 'Apostolic Succession' was categorically rejected; and if Knox's comments on the 'Tulchan' establishment be regarded it will be seen that he, broken in health, was accepting what he could not prevent, and was endeavouring to make sure that the state should not obtain complete control over the kirk. It must be added that Knox himself never endeavoured to become a bishop, and the argument that he found himself more influential and very well paid as minister of St. Giles is hardly good. Knox was by nature a master, and if he had thought that episcopacy contained any essential mastery in the kirk he would himself have become a bishop.

Knox's Influence on the Wane

The rejection of the *Book of Discipline* by the Estates in January, 1561, was a serious blow to the power of Knox, and with the return of Mary from France in the following August his influence began slowly to wane. The Queen's proclamation, issued on 25 August, promised not to attempt anything against the form of religion she found established on her arrival, and it is possible to suppose from Knox's own words that even his criticism was for the moment disarmed. None the less, when the Queen introduced her private Mass into Holyrood House he boldly declared in a sermon that one Mass was more fearful to him than if ten thousand armed enemies were landed to suppress the whole religion; but though the English agent Randolph asserted that

* A *Tulchan* was a calf's skin stuffed with straw and set beside a cow to encourage her to give milk. The 'bishops' erected by Morton after 1572 had the title, but were compelled to surrender much of the revenue to government pensioners.

Knox ' rulethe the roste, and of hym all men stande in feare ', yet even he doubted lest the preacher's thunderings from the pulpit would one day ' marre all.' Compromise was in the air, and the young Queen, aware that Knox still spoke to a large public from the pulpit of St. Giles, endeavoured to lure him from his opposition by the exercise of her personal charm. To that end she summoned him to the first of the famous interviews in September, 1561, and later offered him the privilege of coming to admonish her privately whenever he thought fit. The idea that he thrust himself upon his mistress and reduced her to tears with his contumelious words is false. Mary wept only on one occasion and then in irritation (not unjustifiable) at Knox's attempts to prevent her marriage with a Catholic prince. On that occasion he was summoned to be rebuked; later he was brought before the Queen and Council to be charged with treason on the ground that he had convoked the Queen's lieges on his own authority in order to defend two brethren who had opposed the use of the Mass. Knox was saved by his friends, but he was in no case to bully the Queen; he had become an embarrassment to his own party.

The Catholics were, of course, against him; and they were probably right in their belief that the young Queen would show herself upon their side. On their hostility Knox must obviously have reckoned all along; what destroyed his authority was the attitude of his own party. In it were many men, notably the Queen's half-brother the Lord James and the subtle Maitland of Lethington, who believed that Mary must, for her own sake, implement the promise made in the proclamation of 25 August. To the politicians it appeared that Mary's interest in the English crown had now become a diplomatic card of the first importance. She declined to ratify the treaty of Leith on the ground that her envoys had exceeded their instructions; and although formally this was not so, it is obvious that she had a real grievance in that the treaty was so worded as to make her renounce her right to the English crown ' in all times coming '. There seemed room for a bargain whereby Mary should abandon her present pretensions in return for an acknowledgement that she was Elizabeth's heir. Such an arrangement proved impossible since the English Queen refused to ' pin up her winding sheet before her eyes ' by naming a successor; but it was under discussion for some time, and it gained in significance because, as early as 1562, there were rumours that Elizabeth would never bear a child. Elizabeth, for her part, was not anxious for a definite quarrel with a princess who might marry a powerful Catholic prince, perhaps even Don Carlos, and become the spearhead of a grand Catholic attack upon schismatic England. Accordingly she too endeavoured to guide the steps of Mary towards moderation in religion and, incidentally, towards some undistinguished husband.

In these circumstances neither the politic Protestants of Scotland nor the English were minded to ally with Knox, who believed that all Catholics were striving against God and that the charming Queen in her pretence of tolerating Protestantism was no more sincere than her mother had been. He admitted the 'inchantment whereby men are bewitched' but he did not fall a victim. From his naïve account of the interviews it may be deduced that he believed himself to have combined courtly grace with directness of speech, and also that he thought himself the winner of the dialectic battle. To some modern readers it may appear that Mary had the better of the encounter, since she forced her redoubtable opponent to admit that he relied upon his own interpretation of the Scriptures; but if the woman had the victory in logic it was the man who was right in instinct. Neither as a Catholic nor as an authoritarian could Mary compromise with Protestantism and the assertion that subjects could control their prince. Part of her seeming complacence was, no doubt, due to her desire to please and her love of the 'joyusitie' in which she had been bred, but part of it was certainly due to political considerations; she was biding her time. Knox, the unconvinced, was an embarrassment to the politicians. He quarrelled definitely with the Lord James, now earl of Moray, to whom he did not speak or write for a long time; and though he met with Lethington in 1564 it was only to dispute about the rights of princes. In all the negotiations with England at this time he played no part at all.

Whilst he thus dropped out of politics he was unable to call an organized kirk to his aid. The *Book of Discipline* remained an empty dream; by an act of the privy council of February, 1562, the existing holders of church lands and revenues—by no means all clerics—were to retain two-thirds of their income, the remaining third to go to the crown which was charged with the obligation of paying the ministers. 'I see', said Knox, 'Twa partis freely gevin to the Devill, and the Third maun be divided betwix God and the Devill.' As late as 1567 there were only two hundred and fifty-seven ministers for one thousand and eighty churches, along with six hundred and six 'readers' and 'exhorters'; and only slowly did the organization grow. The Kirk Session was there from the start. At the other end of the hierarchy the General Assembly made its appearance in 1560. This was, at first, an uncertain body; its first meeting contained only forty-two members of whom thirty-six were laymen; to begin with it was a biennial affair, meeting every year at the height of summer and again in the depth of winter; and only in 1563 did a 'moderator' make a somewhat tentative appearance. The Synod, or Provincial Assembly, was introduced in 1562, but the Presbytery Court, founded from a group of parishes, was not

introduced until 1580, and even then owed much to an English model.

This slow and uncertain development at once reveals and explains the relative impotence of Knox. He was still of great reputation; in 1564 he married Margaret Stewart of Ochiltree, the daughter of one of his supporters Lord Ochiltree, to the derision of his Catholic critics. Nicol Burne described him as riding to his wedding with a great court on a trim gelding not like a prophet or old decrepit priest as he was, but like a prince of the blood with his taffeta ribbons, gold rings, and jewels. Knox may have looked older than his age and his enemies attributed his conquest to sorcery.

In the dramatic crises of Mary's reign during the years 1566–67 Knox played little part. Though he was not old his health was feeble; but it may have been uncertainty of mind as well as bodily weakness which withheld him from the action. His principles, indeed, remained unaltered. Rome remained the great and soul-destroying work of the devil, and Mary, to whom he did not hesitate to give a very evil name, was a worthy agent of the great 'whore of Babylon'. But some of his friends had disappointed him, of others he was uncertain, and in the place of the old sureness of action there appears a degree of hesitancy. Occasionally, however, he showed himself resolute enough. When Darnley, anxious to placate the opinion of Edinburgh, attended a service at St. Giles' in August, 1565 (just when Moray and his friends were mustering against the Queen), Knox in his sermon, which was very long, showed how 'God justly punished Ahab and his posterity, because he would not take order with that harlot Jezebel'. Not surprisingly, he was summoned before the council, where he appears to have been more outspoken than ever, warning Mary that her husband would be an instrument of her ruin; and he suffered no penalty save that he was forbidden to preach for fifteen or twenty days.

After the Queen had ejected her rebels his position must have become hazardous and, perhaps in his own interest, he was sent out of Edinburgh on an indeterminate mission to visit the churches of the south; after the murder of Riccio, in which he seems to have had no part at all, he was in real peril and early in 1566 he betook himself to Kyle, where he found occupation in completing and polishing his *History*. Although he returned to Edinburgh in September, 1566, when, presumably, the birth of Prince James had slackened the tension, he soon got leave from the General Assembly to visit the two sons of his first marriage.*

* Nathaniel and Eleazer, aged nine and eight respectively, who afterwards went to St. John's College, Cambridge; the younger became a clergyman in the Church of England, and died in 1591. By his second wife he had three daughters, Martha, Margaret, and Elizabeth.

The Last Years of Knox, 1567–1572

Only upon the fall of Mary did he return to his own land. In July, 1567, he was threatening the people with the great plague of God if she were not 'condignly punished'. On 29 July he preached at the coronation of James and in the following December, at the opening of a 'Protestant' parliament, which ratified the acts of 1560. When the Queen escaped to England he still pursued her with his hate, warning Cecil that 'if ye strike not at the root the branches that appear to be broken will bud again', and his hate became more envenomed when his old patron, the Regent Moray, was murdered in the streets of Linlithgow in January, 1570. His old eloquence came to his aid and in the month following the murder he brought to tears a congregation of three thousand when he preached in St. Giles on 'Blessed are the Dead that Die in the Lord'. Towards the end of 1570 he had a slight stroke, and in the following spring he was vexed by accusations launched from Edinburgh Castle where Kirkcaldy of Grange, once his own ally and a henchman of Moray, still held out for the Queen. His friends urged him to disregard the slanders, but he insisted in replying from the pulpit of St. Giles to the charges of sedition, schism, and erroneous teaching, and concluded by giving him 'a lye in his throat, that either dar, or will say, that ever I socht support against my native countrie'.

In May, 1571, he left Edinburgh for St. Andrews. The famous account of his sojourn there given in James Melville's *Diary* shows him as a 'done' man who had to be assisted into the pulpit, but who, in the course of his sermon, became so vigorous that he was 'lyke to ding that pulpit in blads and fly out of it'. He absolutely refused to take any part in the installation of John Douglas, rector of the university (whom he personally liked), as Archibshop of St. Andrews, and heartily supported St. Leonard's College in its dispute with St. Salvator's, repudiating, incidentally, the allegation that he had signed the 'band' for the Darnley murder. Though unable to attend the General Assembly at Perth, he sent pertinent articles and questions about the 'Tulchan' establishment, with a covering letter containing the admonition 'above all things, preserve the church from the bondage of the universities'. He even found time to publish a reply, written long before, to the Jesuit James Tyrie. In that he makes mention of his approaching end; an appendix, dated 12 July, 1572, concludes:

> 'I hartly salute and tak my good-night of all the faithfull in both the Realmes; earnestly desyring the assistance of their prayers, that without any notable sclander to the Evangell of Jesus Christ I may end my battell: for as the worlde is wearie of me, so am I of it.'

In all his correspondence of this period the same theme appears; it was high time that he was gone.

Yet it was not in St. Andrews, but in Edinburgh that death came to him. His colleague in St. Giles, John Craig, had shown himself too friendly to the party in the Castle and when, on 31 July, a truce was arranged, the congregation anxiously summoned their trusted minister to return to them. He left St. Andrews on 17 August, and on the last day of the month occupied his pulpit once more. He was now very feeble. On 7 September he wrote to his chosen successor, James Lawson of Aberdeen, 'Haist, leist ye come to lait', and when October came his voice was audible only to those in his immediate vicinity. Still the indomitable will remained. When the news of the St. Bartholemew came he preached a sermon against the King of France so vehement that the French ambassador protested: in vain, for the Lords said that they could not stop Knox from preaching even against themselves. He consented, if Killigrew can be trusted, to the plan for having Mary executed in Scotland; he warned Kirkcaldy that unless he repented he would be hanged on the gallows facing the sun.

The Legacy of Knox to Scotland

Hanged that valiant and luckless captain was when Edinburgh Castle surrendered to an Anglo-Scottish army on 28 May, 1573; but long ere the prophesy was fulfilled its maker was dead. On 9 November, Knox inducted Lawson into St. Giles, and two days later he took to his bed. The story of his last hours shows him in a humane light; paying his servant his last wages with a luck-penny and a grim joke; opening a hogshead of wine for two callers, John Durie and Archibald Stewart, and bidding Archibald send for the same so long as it lasted, 'for he wald never tarie until it were drunken'; taking his last 'gud nycht' of his elders and deacons, and making arrangements about his coffin. To a pious woman who praised his godliness he said, 'Ladie, flesch of itself is ower proude and neidis no meanis to esteam the self'; and when he repeated the Lord's Prayer he said 'who can pronunce so holie wordis?' He caused his wife to read the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians 'of the Resurrection', and then the place where 'first I caist my first ancre'. So she read the seventeenth chapter of St. John which deals with the eternal communion of the Father, the Son and those whom God had given to the Son. Soon afterwards he died as confident in the face of death as he had been throughout his life.

The confidence that he was among those given by the Father to the Son is the secret of Knox's strength and of his weakness, too. Of his weakness he was conscious. In a prayer composed in March, 1566, he wrote:

> 'In youth, myd age, and now, after many battelles, I find nothing into me bot vanitie and corruption. For, in quyetnes I am negligent, in trouble impatient, tending to disperation;

and in the meane state, I am so caryed away with vane fantaseis, that, (allace), O Lord, they withdraw me from the presence of thy Majestie.'

Yet he went on to say, 'be thy meare grace I dout not myself to be electit to eternal salvation in Jesus Christ'. At one time, in and about the year 1565, he seems to have felt that the struggle had availed nought and that all his efforts had been vain. Yet as the bodily weakness, which had helped to produce the depression, increased so did his spirit regain its strength, and as he drew near to death he felt a surge of exhaltation. At the end of his controversy with the Marians in 1571 he was able to write :

> 'What I have bene to my cuntrie, albeit this unthankful aige will not knowe, yet the aiges to come wilbe compelled to beir witnes to the treuth.'

History has vindicated his opinion of himself. He was right in thinking that between the *semper eadem* of Rome and the spirit of Protestantism there could be no compromise ; he was right in believing that Protestantism, if it was to establish itself, must do so by force and that, if it did, that Papacy would surely try by force to recover its lost dominions. From his assumption that the cause of Rome was the cause of evil it followed that for him there was, throughout his life, a constant battle between God and the devil, and from his certainty that he was on the side of God there followed the assurance that his side must ultimately prevail. He firmly believed and did not hesitate to assert that true ministers had the same power to remit sins which Jesus granted to his apostles, and the *Book of Discipline* demands that a congregation should obey its chosen minister 'evin as thai wald obey God Him self'. He believed that he had himself the gift of prophesy. Hence came his power. Hence the eloquence that fired the hearts of men and his obvious ascendency over the hearts of women. His unshakable conviction made him ruthless towards the enemies of truth as he knew it ; but it also made him indomitable in misfortune, and in the good day and the evil day alike still constant to his purpose.

The form of religion which he, more than any one man, erected in Scotland has seemed to many people ungracious and hard, and by its very severity an easy prey to loud hypocrisy. Yet it established the two ideas that every human act was of eternal significance and that God demanded of all his creatures absolute submission to His Will. Gentle and simple, rich and poor, all were equal in the sight of God and all alike owed obedience to the divine law. No man could fulfil the whole of the law, but the Grace of God and the imputed righteousness of Christ would come to the aid of those 'elected',—there was the rub!—by God in His inscrutable wisdom, and the elect would be known by their works. It was the duty of every man, in obeying the Law of God, to turn

to the use of the commonwealth whatever powers he possessed, to make full use of the talent God had given him, and although all were equal in the sight of God, in the world of men there was a great variety of gifts. The ideal state of the *Book of Discipline* might be described in modern parlance as a 'welfare state', but it was not equalitarian.

This *Book of Discipline*, though it was never authorized by parliament, moulded the life of Scotland for centuries. Certain modern critics, who brand Knox as an iconoclast without great consideration of the thing which he destroyed, say that it produced in Scotland a people self-righteous and narrow in religion, indifferent to the graces of life, blind to the holiness of beauty, and deaf to all music save the Psalms. Others believe that it was a great factor in producing a race patient of discipline, valuing moral integrity and anxious for education, convinced of the dignity of honest work, trained to endeavour and to enterprise, apt for adventure and even for imperialism. Those who disparage Knox would do well to remember that in denouncing him they denounce also the qualities which have enabled the children of a small poor country to set their mark upon the history of the world.

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